Round About Pirapo.

Queer Aspects of Nature and Man in the Wilds of Paraguay.

A Night in a Country Hotel and a Look at a Store of the Backwoods—Paraguay's Only Railroad and Its Queer Passengers—Its Women Peddlers who Sell Raw Meat at the Stations—How the Country Looks—Its Rich Pastures—Its Tens of Thousands of Ant Hills—The Homes of the People and Something About Two American Who Came to Paraguay and Married Them.

PIRAPO, PARAGUAY, January 4, 1899.

Have you ever heard of Pirapo? It is at the tail end of the railroad at the tail end of creation. It is to the very heart of South Paraguay, about twenty miles south of the upper Paraná steps and 150 miles away from junction of Asuncion. Your compass account it, for it is right out on the prairie and great droves of cattle graze at about the station and range away in the blue. The place has all told not more than 500 inhabitants. It has a hotel and does low late mode of women poles linked in with mud and roofed with grey thatch. The railroad depot is about fifteen feet square, and the only place in mode of food and pies and coffee with mixed tea.

THE PRIMY PILLOWS OF PIRAMO.

In this hotel I have stopped over night, sleeping in a room with four other travelers, but, thank fortune, being a bed to myself. And such a bed! It was of the kind most common in Paraguay. It was a canvas cot open elsewhere, with a plump pillow so small I feared it would get lost in it in my car and so hard that it almost seemed a hole into my head. My room mate were a German cattle buyer, a Paraguayan apache and Mr. William Harrison, the resident agent of one of our life insurance companies. The German coughed all night, the Paraguayan snored like a fur bear, and Harrison at intervals cheered his throat and denounced the others for keeping him awake. It was indeed a restful night.

And still it was a good hotel for Paraguay. The meals were cooked by a young Italian who boasted like a butler and who made no think of a slaughter house. He treated about to his ears feet and mutted on the table with his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Our dinner consisted of a good vegetable soup, followed by pudding or boiled beef, stewed chicken and rice, a kidney saute and peanut candy for dessert. Wine was furnished free with the dinner. We had fresh bread but no butter. The dishes were brought in in courses, and we had both a table cloth and napkins. Our breakfast was merely a black coffee and dry bread, to which I added a couple of oranges.

A COUNTRY STORE IN PARAGUAY.

Our Italian landlord was also a storekeeper. Every little hotel away from the cities has a store in it and this store will give some idea how things are sold in the backwoods of South America. The store room was perhaps twenty feet square. It was stuffed with shelves, filled with the goods most in demand among Paraguayans. There were calicoes and ginghams for the form the staple clothes of the country. The men often wear white pants and shirts, the women wear white mosaic skirts and shawls, and the Paraguayans are, in fact, a nation in white. On another of this store was devoted to groceries, and in it were shelves of sardine boxes, canned meats and bottles containing mustard, bitters and liquors. On the floor in one corner stood two barrels, with dripping spigots, showing that they were constantly flowing. One was filled with a clear Italian wine, which sells for about twenty cents a quart, and the other contained cassia (sugar), which is popular, which is made from cane, and which will kill at forty rods. The brandy costs about thirteen cents a quart, and he is so powerful that a honorary will inoculate an American town. A man can, in fact, get a cheap drink in Paraguay than in any other place in the world, for with a dime he can get enough liquor to put several men to sleep.

The store also sold all kinds of eatables, such as sugar, tea and bread. The little baking is done by the people, and the hotel takes for the whole community about it. The store also sells a stock of hats, shoes and clothing. It has a little hardware from the United States, and a pair of scales which were made by a Connecticut firm of Vermont. These last were the only American things I could see anywhere. The scales, which are about the same as to be of universal consumption. I did not ask the hotel keeper for a cocktail, but I doubt not he could have made one if ordered.

Before leaving I photographed the hotel, which is built on one of the streets at the corner of the hotel. Mine has brought out his Paraguayan wife, who is a good looking woman. Nobbie and could them for me while I pressed the button.

AN ODD RAILROAD.

Paraguay has only one railroad, and it is the only one of its kind in the world. It was built by an English company with a big subsidy from the Paraguayan government, and it is managed by the English company. The cars are at such a low level that a boy could easily climb on the one of the train might keep up and pulverize the sage grouse on the prairie adjacent to it. It work at the stations, and you have as much time as you want for your meals the train being made up in a barrow yard at the last of the passengers to trough drinking his coffee. I understand that the road has paid a good dividend under its management, and it may be improved by the time this letter is published. The rolling stock is of the most primitive kind, it having evidently been made during the last generation.

The cars are of the vestibule were low and differed according as to whether it is with first, second or third class. The first class cars are much like those in that there is an aisle running through the center with seats on each side. The seats are cushioned with rubber and are not uncomfortable. The second class cars are about the same, but those of the third class have windows like a street car, with two other benches running back to back through the center of the car.

The third-class cars were filled with women and men, the most of whom were smoking and chewing. There were more women than men and more smokers among them. Some of the girls were very pretty, but almost all, from three of twenty to little tots of six, had the cigars in their mouths.

At every station I saw women smoking cigars and women cigar peddlers came to the car windows and offered to hawker of cigars at the rate of one two dime. I judged that most of the girls had fairly good teeth, and I could have fallen in love with their round, faces, dark, lustrous eyes and soft, black hair, had it not been for the cigars. They were so disgustingly unfeminine. I spent some time among the third-class passengers now and then going through the cars to look at the girls. I did not find this always an easy task, for the seats were so close that the knees of the women on the opposite seats touched mine, and I had to go very carefully to avoid stepping on their bare toes. Many of them had their feet in the seats, in their trolleys, showing at my cars as I went by.

WOMEN PEDDLERS.

At most of the stations the coming of the train was the great event of the day. Half the town turned out to the depot as the whistle blew, and a crowd of women peddlers were to be seen vociferating on the platform. Some had baskets of oranges before them. Others had vegetables and others meat. Think of selling raw meat on a railroad station! Nearly every depot on this road has its butcher women, who sit on the stones with great baskets of raw beef about them and peddle chunks out to the passengers. At one place two women had cigars in their mouths, and they smoked as they chatted with one another by fifteen minutes. Other women were selling lace and others had baby clothes. I saw one or two shoe peddlers and women were selling calico, cutlibs and sweets.

TEN ORANGES FOR A CENT.

The oranges were delicious. They are now better to be found anywhere than in Paraguay and some elsewhere, as shall see.

I have bought a dozen oranges every day since I came into Paraguay, and I is everything how many one can eat. The poorer people live on them during the season, and I have seen women for a man to eat twenty-five in a day. You can get them almost for the asking. I paid ten cents for a peck. At one of the stations, Santa Clara, I offered a needle, worth three-quarters of an American cent, to an orange girl, saying in my gibberish Spanish:

"Quanto oranges por un needle, senorita?"

"Diez" (eight), replied the damsel, as she gripped her cigar between her ivory teeth and held out both hands full of oranges. They were as low as any raised on the Indian river. They were fresh from the tree and said I been able to go to the orchards I might have probably had them for the picking. Here orange trees are seldom cultivated, but they produce fruit of such sweetness and color that you might think the sap was mixed with sugar and gold.

The skins of the oranges are full of oil. They have so much that if we squeeze an orange past bottom of oil will stand out upon it, and if you touch a match to it it burns. These bubbles will go off in a flash as though they were powder. I should think that factories for making nitroglycerine and other things from oranges might be established here at a profit.

QUEER THINGS IN PARAGUAY.

I am surprised at the beauties of the better Paraguay. The country is rolling, and there is something new to be seen at almost every turn of the old wheel. There are orange trees in the backyards and nearly every village of thatched huts has orange trees about it. There are lemon trees, too, in plenty. They grow in groves or in clumps rather than in forests. Some varieties are peculiar. The lemons are about the size of balls, no larger around than a walnut, but of the same shape as the large oval lemon we get in the north. These little comments are very valuable, and the raising of them is one of the most profitable of the small industries of Paraguay. They are ground up and used for making soap.

Large parts of Paraguay are natural pasture, with here and there clumps of woods or forests scattered through them. It is only the hills that are covered with trees. The most of the other lands have a rich growth of grass. Nearly all of the land along the railroad is taken up. It is held in large tracts, many of the farms being fenced with barbed wire. It is quite a notion the different kinds of pasture. Some are covered with grass, which is coarse, gray and dead, and right next to these you will ride through meadows as green as Kansas in June. The green fields are where the land has been burned over to improve the pasture. As soon as the dead grass is burned off the green sprout comes up. This burning is done by many farmers once every year. I have found the grass better as I have come to the south. About Pirapo there is grass as high as your waist, and the cattle are standing in it up to their bellies.

The cattle are of a mongrel breed. They are much like the long-horned stock which we had in Texas a generation ago, and which, until within a few years, were common in the Argentine. Now the Argentines have very fine stock, and this will eventually be the case with the Paraguayans. The most of the stock here feed out in the open without visible care. I have seen a herdsman with some cows at the farms I have watched the cowboys roundup up the cattle and branding the calves. The cattle are thrown to the ground and the branded pat on with rudest irons. Upon rising they are will and revengeful, and frequently attack the cowboys at such times if they can catch them on foot.

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ANT HILLS.

One of the queerest things to me in this country is the ant hills. All the way from Buenos Ayres to Pirapo I saw the thing that curse Paraguay upside down. It is the only bad thing in the country, so far as I know, of this. It work everywhere. There are fields here covered with thousands of ant hills. Some will be as high as a barrow and a yard in diameter. Others are not as large as a water keg. They are red or brown, according to the soil of which they are made. These hills spoil the landscape as the burial mounds do that of Illinois. They are found in the cultivated lands and in the pasture fields, where you see long-horned cattle eating the grass around them. Sometimes they are only a few feet apart and sometimes fifteen and twenty and more. The ant hills are so big that a man could go to that there is an ant running through the center with seats on each side. The seats are cushioned with rubber and are not uncomfortable. The second-class cars are about the same, but those of the third class have windows like a street car, with two other benches running back to back through the center of the car.

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